DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 310 845 PS 018 049

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TITLE Appropriate Curriculum for Full-Time Kindergarten.
PUB DATE Apr 89
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at the Meeting of the Association for Childhood Education International (Indianapolis, IN, April 6-9, 1989).
PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Creativity; *Elementary School Curriculum; Guidelines; *Kindergarten; *Learning Centers (Classroom); Primary Education; *Teacher Role
IDENTIFIERS *Full Day Programs

ABSTRACT

Appropriate curricula for full-time kindergarten children must emphasize creativity in several subject areas, including arts and crafts, science, social studies, mathematics, thinking, and language arts. This article offers practical suggestions for providing kindergarten children with opportunities to be creative in several ways. Arguments against the use of workbooks and worksheets are advanced. Learning centers are described and their use is outlined. Finally, the role of adults in facilitating and enhancing children's creative experiences is described. (RH)

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APPROPRIATE CURRICULUM FOR FULL TIME KINDERGARTEN

Presentation at Association for Childhood Education International, Indianapolis, Indiana, April, 1989.

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ABSTRACT for

APPROPRIATE CURRICULUM FOR FULL TIME KINDERGARTEN

Presentation at Association for Childhood Education International, Indianapolis, Indiana, April, 1989.

Oelerich, Marjorie L.

To be appropriate for kindergarten children, the curriculum for full time kindergarten programs must emphasize creativity. This article lists characteristics of creativity as should be experienced by children. Implications for various disciplines--science, social studies, language, etc.--are discussed. This appropriate curriculum does not include workbooks and worksheets, reasoning for which is discussed. Various learning centers and their uses are outlined. The role of the adult in this appropriate kindergarten curriculum is identified.

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"Proudly holding up his drawing, which was covered entirely with different size circles, six-year-old Paul signaled that he had finished. Pulling the paper out of his hand, his first grade teacher announced in a loud voice, 'What a mess, Paul. Can't you do something neat and nice instead of just messing with your paper?' Paul was crushed. Tearfully, he asked to show his drawing to his former teacher in kindergarten. Permission granted, Paul rushed out and excitedly entered the kindergarten room. The teacher looked up, somewhat amazed at his precipitous arrival. 'What have we here?' she asked.

"'I wanted to show you my drawing. It took me a long time. I just finished it.' The teacher looked down at the paper filled with carefully drawn circles of all sizes. 'What a nice drawing,' she said. 'Tell me about it.'

"'They're buttons,' Paul stated with emphasis. 'All kinds of buttons. These are for a rocket, this one rings a bell, this one blows a siren, this one.... You know, buttons are to push.'"(Young, 1970)

Such creativity is appropriate for the curriculum for full time kindergarten children. Only as children become effective thinkers will they be effective learners and contributors to society.

And full time kindergarten programs should be available for children. A network of professionals interested in

these programs has been formed; contact Susan W. Nall, Box 1122, Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville, IL 62026.

It is commonly understood that "creativity" refers only to arts and crafts. Such an association is too limited. Creativity must be the basis of all areas of thinking and learning.

This article will briefly discuss creativity in terms of several areas of children's experiences: arts and crafts, science, social studies, mathematics, thinking, and language arts.

Creativity involves the process of experiencing and expressing problem-solving behavior. As such, it encompasses all of learning and is characterized by certain features:

1. children express their experiences--there is no model to be copied.

2. results may or may not have been pre-determined in the minds of children.

3. children usually can do the task themselves, inasmuch as the purpose is NOT to replicate another product.

4. observers cannot predict the resulting product.

5. experiences will be developmentally appropriate for children.

Adults working with young children will want to enlarge their awareness of, and techniques for, encouraging creativity. The teacher's responses will determine whether the process or the product is of paramount importance.

A consideration of art activities, for example, must clearly distinguish between those experiences which emphasize the process and those which emphasize the product. Materials made available to the children will in themselves offer--or limit--opportunities for creativity. It is not enough to have available the clay and tempera, paste and scissors, crayons and fabric scraps, and play-doh or clay. It is the teacher's expectations which result in opportunities for children to be creative. The teacher must convey to the children that they are free to design their own creations with the materials rather than being expected to achieve a pre-determined product.

Science experiences may be used to nurture creative thinking. Children are excited about the world around them. They seek to understand the world as they ask their WHY questions. Children will have adventures as they experiment with cause and effect, what happens if, how much, or how many. Watching the changing weather, feeding the birds, taking a walk to collect interesting leaves and seeds, and talking to one another--all of these open up opportunities for children to discover basic concepts about the world. Much of the adventure comes when the adult asks, "How could we find out?" Such a response draws on children's creativity and leads to a myriad of interesting results and conclusions.

Social studies offer real-life experiences in which children will explore and experiment as they discover

meaningful concepts. For example, a "cookie factory" learning center (Oelerich and Peterson, 1987) will help children learn the processes involved in making cookies, packaging them, and selling them.

Kamii has provided background information relating to the process by which children experience and learn mathematics concepts. The wise teacher provides appropriate mathematics opportunities which are functional for children. In addition, the wise teacher exercises patience as children become involved in thinking about the situation and in solving the problem in their own way. We adults may recognize a short-cut for solving the problem. However, when we impose our solutions, we deprive children of the opportunity to think and to learn. (Kamii, 1984)

To encourage creative thinking, tell (or read) an open-ended story based on a problem-solving situation. One example is A PUPPY FOR MY BIRTHDAY (Keefe, 1986) in which the child will choose one puppy for the birthday. However, which puppy will the child choose? The closing lines present the dilemma: "Which puppy should I take home with me? Tell me which one YOU would take."

Another meaningful example is TRICERATOPS: THE LAST DINOSAUR (Sandell, 1988). One child in the story discovers some fossils in the field. When he shares the fossils with the class, questions raised by the children become a basis for the study about fossils and dinosaurs. The story concludes with the suggestion that there is still much

information to be learned about dinosaurs. And, maybe, someday these young children will become scientists to discover such information.

The process of learning the language should be the basis for language arts in the early childhood experience. Therefore, the Whole Language strategy must be incorporated. Talking, listening, writing, reading and all areas of the language arts must be natural components of the early childhood environment. However, all of these aspects of language must occur in real situations which are critical to meaningful experiences for children. The Whole Language strategy provides opportunities for children to interact with real materials and experiences, to consider the situation from their perspective, and to evaluate several possible responses. (Y. Goodman, 1985; K. Goodman, 1986; Jewell, 1986; Altwerger, Edelsky and Flores, 1987)

Workbooks and worksheets do not belong in the early childhood program. (Kamii, 1985) Among the many reasons for not using such materials are the following:

1. the act of learning occurs when the young child is interacting with real materials and experiences--not when marking on a blank line.

2. learning occurs when the child is considering the situation from his perspective--not when attempting to guess the teacher's answer.

3. learning occurs when children are encouraged to consider several possible responses--not when there is only one acceptable answer.

In addition to many first-hand, concrete experiences, such as field trips and resource visitors, the curriculum for young children must utilize learning centers.

Simply stated, a learning center is a collection of materials which have a common purpose and which are available and accessible to children. Within the classroom, there must be a number of such learning centers, each of which provides appropriate materials for children to examine, explore, and experiment. (Spodek, 1986; Fromberg, 1986; Day, 1988)

Art materials must be available in one learning center. Tempera paints, finger paints, collage, glue, paper of various colors and sizes, scissors, marking tools (pencils, pens), and playdoh are a few items which must be provided children.

A science learning center must include live plants and animals as well as inanimate materials, such as magnets or machines or a collection of stones or feathers.

A mathematics learning center must include objects for children to manipulate as they explore classification, one-to-one correspondence, and number ideas. Paper and marking tools (pencils, pens) must be provided for children who want to record their experiences.

A language arts learning center must include quality stories for children to have read with them and, indeed, for children to "read" the illustrations and concepts. Audio earphones and tape recordings provide individualized story times. Also, utilize the tape recorder for children to record their own experiences or to create their own stories. Provide paper and pencils for children to record their own thoughts and experiences in writing. Perhaps this area of creative writing and of handwriting epitomizes most obviously the fact that the emphasis must be on the process rather than the product.

The necessity of nurturing creativity in the lives of children is most clearly shown in Piaget's view. The principal goal of education "is to create men who are capable of doing new things, not simply of repeating what other generations have done, men who are creative, inventive, and discoverers." (Ripple, 1964)

As we work with young children, let us always remember that the role of the adult is three-fold:

1. to provide appropriate materials and experiences,
2. to allow time for exploration, and
3. to serve as a guide by the side of the child.

Only by investigating, experimenting with, and exploring the environment, will young children discover concepts which are meaningful. Truly, buttons are to push!

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